THE
RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. III. May 28, 1937 Sivan 18, 5697 No. 8

EDITORIALS

THE POWER OF RELIGION AT ITS BEST

A JEWISH CAMP FOR YOUR CHILD

"THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER"

THE COMMUNIST SOLUTION OF THE JEWISH PROBLEM

By Samuel Dinin

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS TODAY

A Report of the Social Justice Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly

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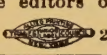

EDITORIALS

The Power of Religion At Its Best

THE recent mass meeting at the Hippodrome in New York City, conducted by "patriotic" organizations, and inspired largely by the leadership of the Catholic Church, lends support to those who contend that the institutions of religion are hopelessly aligned with the forces of reaction. The denunciations of "these forces, call them communists, socialists, modern democracy or other more appealing names," supplemented by threats of incredible brutality against the defenders of human rights, sound like the calls to fierce battle against any form of progressive action. On Sunday, May 2, the Catholics again organized a demonstration to combat "atheistic communism," venting their wrath against the workers who "stressed the rights of man but entirely forgot the rights of God." Regretfully we record that rabbis joined in each of the reactionary demonstrations.

Are the institutions of religion hopelessly obstructionist? Is there no possibility that those who represent the organized efforts of social groups to express religious ideologies are inevitably bound up with the status quo, and that they will resist change at any cost? So it might seem from a cursory glance at the religious scene. But happily there is another aspect of the situation which, unfortunately, does not receive the publicity that it deserves. For example, during the past few weeks, the clergy, Jewish and non-Jewish, of Long Island, have been cooperating closely with the Newspaper Guild in its effort to gain recognition for workers on a newspaper in that locality. One of the most heartening features of that close cooperation between the workers and the clergy has been the daily prayer meeting to which hundreds of pickets have come before entering upon their gruelling vigil before the newspaper plant. Here is an instance of men seeking the inspiration of religion to give them the courage and the fortitude to fight for their rights.

Another instance of religion's awakening to its powers for righteousness may be observed in the activity of the Religion and Labor Foundation in connection with the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, the union which is organizing the enslaved and oppressed sharecroppers of the South. This Union has recently published a little pamphlet entitled "Ceremony of

the Land," a religious liturgy performed in January of this year at the Third Annual Convention of the Union. The thrilling and exalted passages contained in this ceremony, drawn from Scriptures and couched in the form of a deeply moving religious service, testify to the vital influence of progressive religion upon the oppressed. Sheer agitation against wealthy landowners might not have achieved the results which were achieved by having the sharecroppers repeat with their own lips the memorable words of Isaiah, "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field till there be no room, and ye be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land." Imagine the zeal and the courage inspired by these sacred texts when applied to the evils of our day!

At long last, apparently, religious leaders are beginning to appreciate the dynamic power which is at hand in their religious tradition. Would that the radicals and liberals had understood the value of religion earlier. Instead, they believed it necessary to repeat, like parrots, the dicta of the Marxists, that religion is an opiate of the masses, etc., etc., *ad nauseum.* They believed that, by fighting religion, by ridiculing it and deprecating it, they could advance the cause of justice. In the meantime, the reactionaries utilized the anti-religious program of the radicals as a weapon against every kind of progressive action. How easy for them to label as "atheistic communism" any suggestion for change which smacked of progressivism! The reactionaries estimated correctly the hold which religion had upon the masses—and they exploited it; the radicals tried to destroy it.

We pray that it is not too late. Let those who seek justice invoke the moral power of religion at its best, and they will prosper against the false prophets. We welcome the report of the Social Justice Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly of America as the latest manifestation of that new spirit in present-day religion. With documents of this kind multiplying, and with instances of concrete cooperation such as we have mentioned on the increase, religion will once more come into its own as the champion of the downtrodden and the oppressed.

A Jewish Camp for Your Child

AT THE end of next month thousands of Jewish children will be leaving their homes to spend the months of July and August in summer camps. At this very moment, hundreds of Jewish parents face the problem of selecting the proper camp. They are busily engaged in reading catalogues, discussing location and equipment, and evaluating the personalities of directors and councillors. Every conscientious Jewish parent will consider also the Jewishness of the camps which solicit their children's attendance.

From one point of view, the summer season offers an ideal opportunity for imbuing our children with Jewish interests and ideals. During the rest of the year most of the child's time and energy are taken up with his public schooling. The Jewish training must, of necessity, be of a marginal character. But during the summer months, the season of vacation from public school, the whole of the child's character is open to constructive Jewish influences. The summer camp is then potentially the most effective instrument for Jewish inspiration. It is the only one instrument that has unlimited access to the child.

This we call to the attention of Jewish parents together with the warning that many, if not most camps which appeal to a Jewish clientele, shamefully waste their supreme opportunity. They make little if any effort to communicate Jewish information, to influence Jewish attitudes, or to fortify Jewish loyalties. No parent concerned with the Jewishness of his child is exempt from asking the following questions: Does the camp offer and stress Jewish educational programs? Does the camp songbook include Jewish folksongs? What is the motivation of the arts and

crafts work and the dramatics? Is any attempt made to provide for the expression of Jewish values in these media? Does the camp observe the dietary laws? We warn parents especially against a "show-window" kind of Judaism. All managers of camps which are supported by a Jewish clientele make much of the fact that they conduct formal religious services. But are those services mechanized and untraditional? Or are they rich with Jewish values, and do they strive to allow the child to find expression for his religious and Jewish interests?

And above all else, we ask parents to consider the personalities and attitudes of the councillors. It is not enough that young men and women should swim well or tell ghost stories effectively. The councillor, because of his intimacy with the child and because of the natural hero-worship of the boy or girl, can confirm or unmake the Jewish efforts of the home. An un-Jewish or anti-Jewish councillor may do irreparable damage to the Jewishness of his campers. One with enthusiasm for Jewish life will communicate, by instruction, informal discussion and example, a loyalty to Jewish values.

Even parents who plan to send their children to camps conducted by Jewish philanthropic or public agencies should be aware of the fact that unfortunately all too often, such Jewish communal camps are managed either by Gentiles or by Jews with no particular Jewish attitudes, except perhaps negative ones. The control of parents over such camps is much less immediate. They do not hold in their hands the bludgeon of the checkbook. But if parents made themselves heard, such camps too would be compelled to give ear to the pressure of public opinion.

We are not asking that summer camps be turned into open-air Jewish classrooms. We recognize the right of the child to vacation and to play. But we do insist that in the long summer day which all camp masters are compelled to break with classes, classes in Judaism be included. We do insist that a child will sing Jewish songs with the same enthusiasm with which he sings the ballads of French Canadian trappers; that he will work in arts and crafts on Jewish motifs as eagerly as on Indian designs; that he will act in a play of Jewish inspiration with as much joy as in any other; and that he would just as soon participate in a Hora dance as in an Indian war dance. Above all, we know from our experience that he will respond to Jewish custom and ceremony beautifully presented, and that he would rather worship in a service which gives vital expression to Jewish and personal ideals than in a dull, mechanical show service intended for the edification of parents who visit over a weekend. In a truly Jewish camp, the child will enjoy as much recreation as in any other, with this significant difference, that, in the process of play, his personality will be won to Jewish values.

With Jewish parents we plead, consider the Jewishness of the camp to which you send your child. You owe this solicitude to your own ideals, to the child's welfare and to Jewish life.

"The Truth of the Matter"

OUT OF the almost incessant calamities and alarms which have beset Palestine since April 1936, at least one comforting event has emerged. Under the auspices of the Histadrut, an Arab weekly has appeared. We now all realize that we should not have waited for the present crisis to launch this paper; that the bare fact that Jews and Arabs live in one land should have made the continuous issuance of an organ as a means of rapprochement a most imperative need; that a publication might have mitigated, if not eliminated, the gravity of the actual situation. Still, better late than never. We accordingly welcome this new vehicle of public opinion.

Judging from the first issue, the name *Hakikat al-Amr* (the Truth of the Matter) is appropriately chosen. This number is singularly free from rank emotion-

alism, although its factual information is presented with just enough warmth and conviction to make its reading not only useful but also stimulating. A leading editorial, "Our First Word," calls on the Arab reader to compare the real benefits bestowed by Jewish immigration on all the inhabitants of Palestine with the alarming cries of the Arab leaders, the peaceful aims of the Jews, particularly the Histadrut, with the false charges of the trouble-makers. It stresses the altogether honorable intentions of the settlers who come not as colonizers but as sons returning to their native land, and who consciously and conscientiously seek to help "human progress and raise the standard of living for all the backward people generally, and for the poor, enslaved and exploited classes in particular." In a "column," a scene, set in a cafe in Haifa, "happy Haifa whom the fates spared from many of the blessings of the raging patriotism," describes a Jew and Arab listening to a radio announcement that thirty Arabs were killed in an encounter with police. Both the Jew and the Arab shed a tear, and this leads to an exchange of views, in the course of which the Arab lays the blood of the victims on the heads of the small clique which was never concerned with the lot of the masses. A list of recent Jewish (and one non-Jewish) victims, unsuspectingly slain by terrorists, carries as a biting refrain, "What a wonderful example of heroism!" Other items are: an article against the government policy towards the fellahin, extracts from Arab newspapers with appropriate replies, the statement of the Jewish agency against the lax policy of the government, articles of general interest, and so on.

The weekly is faced with the very serious problem of circulation. It will prove of little value, if it is read by the handful of Jews who understand Arabic. In an interesting letter to the Jewish Morning Journal, I. Klinow discusses various channels of distribution. It is relatively easy to circulate the paper among Arabs in cities with a mixed population, through joint clubs, Arab newspaper vendors and less fanatical Arabs. To purely Arab towns the post will have to carry it. Klinow rightly urges the need of spreading it also among non-Palestine Arabs and among Arabic-speaking Jews, both of which groups are at present dependent on a biased press. It may not be easy for this weekly to reach its desired readers, but it must make every effort in that direction. It cannot hope to be profit-making. On the contrary, it will probably prove a financial liability, but there are few enterprises on which Jewish money can be spent as wisely as on this. Whether it will be the lot of public-spirited individuals or of an official agency to support it, one thing is certain: it must be continued. We heartily welcome the *Hakikat al-Amr* into the field of journalistic endeavor, wishing it a constantly widening circle of Arab readers and a maintenance of the high level reached in the first issue.

The Communist Solution of the Jewish Problem

By Samuel Dinin

I

FOR a number of years the Jewish communists in America were not greatly bothered about the Jewish problem. Since they recognized only class distinctions, they appealed to Jewish proletarians on a class basis, and held out communism to them as a cure for their economic ills. They were not particularly concerned about the problem of Judaism or the future of Jewish culture in America. To be sure, they knew the Party attitude to Judaism and Zionism. Since Judaism was a religion, and religion was an opiate which served to drug the people into insensibility to the class struggle, the Jewish communists divorced themselves completely from Jewish life, and considered themselves Jews only by accident of birth. Since Zionism was a tool of British imperialism and was declared counter-revolutionary in Russia, because it bred a nationalism which was inimical to the establishment of a united Socialist Soviet, Jewish communists in America were anti-Zionist.

Practically, however, they gave little thought to Zionism and Palestine. Palestine was a small country with a small Jewish population and was of little consequence in the world's affairs. With the task of bringing about a world revolution facing them, how could they bother about a little country like Palestine? The typical American Jewish communist, therefore, (excluding the Yiddish communists) like Michael Gold, was essentially a Red assimilationist. He did not try to hide or deny his Jewishness. He was neither proud nor ashamed of it. He couldn't be a Zionist, because Zionism was reactionary. Being an atheist and a materialist, he had nothing in common with religious Jewish life. And Jewish culture was so bound up with religion and religious literature that it was meaningless to him. The Jewish problem was by and large an economic one. His concern was to bring about a socialist society in which there would be no discrimination against the Jew *qua* Jew, and where, presumably, Jew and non-Jew would fuse and disappear as such, and emerge as new beings, citizens of an American Soviet, which in turn was to be part of a World Soviet.

During the past few years, however, there has been a decided change in the attitude of American communists and of American Jewish communists to the problem of Jewish culture and Jewish national survival. The factors responsible for this change are too well known to be gone into at great length, and only a few will be mentioned here. The encouragement given by Russia to national minority groups within her borders, and the consequent encouragement given to the development of Jewish cultural activities, is one factor which has caused a like interest to be shown in Jewish culture as distinct from Jews, by communists in this country. The remarkable growth of Palestine and the increasing hold of Zionism on the Jewish masses made Palestine a serious rival and a threat to the spread of communistic propaganda, and the American Jewish communists acquired a new interest in the Arabs and in Palestine. The setting up of Biro-Bidjan as a prospective Jewish socialist republic, making necessary a new orientation on the part of American Jewish communists to the whole problem of Jewish national survival and the role of territorialism in such a survival, is a third factor in the change of attitude.

Still another is the new tactics adopted by the Communist Party during the de-

pression. Its policy is now one of gradualism, of working with other proletarian groups toward a united front, of wooing discontented groups to the cause of communism by playing constantly upon the causes of the discontent. This accounts for the renewed interest of American Jewish communists not only in the problem of anti-Semitism here and abroad, but in other Jewish problems as well. The scoop John Spivak made in the *New Masses* with his disclosure of anti-Semitic activities in America is typical of this new interest in the Jewish problem. That it was aimed primarily at winning the Jewish masses over to communism is evident from the attempt made to show that even rich Jews contributed to anti-Semitic organizations, and that anti-Semitism was an economic problem, primarily, and not a social or cultural one.

It is not surprising, therefore, that recent books by Jewish communists should reveal increasing concern with the Jewish problem. Of course, most of the Jewish communists still remain Red assimilationists, and evince little interest or desire for Jewish group survival. Only a minority, consisting mostly of recent converts who were themselves active in Jewish life (some of whom are still engaged professionally in Jewish activities) profess an interest in Jewish cultural survival. Thus, of the three books which come under consideration in this review, only one shows some concern for the problem of Jewish group survival. Another has a chapter on Palestine. The author of the third is concerned only with his Jewish origins, and not with the future survival of the Jewish group.

2.

Lester Cohen's "Two Worlds"* is an account of a year's travel in many lands, France, England, Russia, Turkey, Palestine, Egypt, India, China and Japan. His year's travels convinced him of what he had known before he set out, that all of us were living in one of two worlds, either the world of capitalism with its rich and poor, with the exploitation of masses, foreign and native, with its decadent culture, poverty and filth, or, the world of communism, a world in which there is no exploitation for profit, a world in which a new society, a new order, a new culture are being built for the benefit of mankind. Mr. Cohen is supposed to have the knack of gaining people's confidence, but "Two Worlds" proved irksome to me not because of its message but because of its style, and the personality of the writer. The book reveals a type of communist mentality which is becoming alarmingly common with the growing success of Soviet Russia. Cohen writes with a smug sense of superiority. His communist faith is like that of a religious fanatic who dismisses other claims to salvation with supercilious indulgence. He is proud of his blonde Gentile wife, Eden. He chuckles inwardly when he thinks how people react to a Cohen with a blonde Gentile wife. He dismisses the Louvre with a sneer. He prides himself on the fact all the art in the Louvre is meaningless to him. It takes him only a few days to penetrate the souls of England, France, in fact, of every country. He looks here and there, asks a few questions, makes a few inquiries, and is ready to disclose the inherent contradictions and injustices of the capitalist system. He is skilful in writing dialogue, and his style is like his traveling, breezy, fast, conversational, impressionistic.

In his travels around the world Cohen condescended to visit Palestine. He stayed in the land a few days visiting only the city of Jerusalem and going for a swim in the Dead Sea. He visited the Holy Sepulchre, the old city, the Wailing Wall; he talked with a Zionist, a Jewish business man, a few Arabs, and off he went to Egypt, knowing all he had to or cared to know about Palestine. How he could arrive at the following conclusion

*"Two Worlds," by Lester Cohen, Covici Friede, New York.

is a mystery! "But this is a land in which an idea, nurtured in martyr blood, takes root. It is beginning to occur to Arab and Jewish workers that their lot is much the same; they have tired of hunger, disease and dirt under the auspices of Allah and Jehovah, they are beginning to work together for a new way of life. . ." (p. 233) Now this may or may not be true, but how one could generalize like this without talking to a single Arab or Jewish worker, without seeing either Jewish or Arab labor enterprises, staying in Jerusalem a few days, and not seeing the rest of the country, is beyond comprehension. Imagine anyone going to Russia for a few days and coming back after talking to a few people here and there, with a pronouncement that Russia is becoming capitalistic. The communists would tear such a person limb from limb, literarily.

But of course Cohen is unlike other mortals. He doesn't have to stay a long time and make thorough studies. He looks here and there and he knows all there is to know, for he has a magic formula, and with that and his roving eye he can master anything in a few days.

Cohen may have spent a few days in the other countries he visited, but in Russia he stayed a comparatively long time. He made it a point to go out without Intourist guides and talk to people everywhere, in order to get an unbiased view. But for the life of him he could find little to criticize, and everything to praise. Some things troubled him, even haunted him, until one day he spoke out about them. He had seen an old beggar with a dry crust of bread, who refused work. He had seen tattered homeless beggar children on the streets of Moscow. Elsewhere he observed the manufacture of porcelain-ware, and the wares were coarse and ungainly. Why couldn't they combine utility and beauty? One day, at a dinner of writers, the great Dimanov spoke and all his querulous questionings vanished. And this is what Cohen tells of Dimanov's speech. "Of course, he said, nothing was perfect as yet, things would become more perfect as people become more capable, more literate, more understanding, more modern, more imbued with the sense of the world that is theirs to make. Well, none of that could be accomplished in a day, but they were always striving for it. Backward and undesirable elements, even amongst their own, in the Party, in the Red Army, were being weeded out. In conclusion: a great many things had been wrong with the world. They had changed the world. There were still things to be changed. Some of these things were in the process of being changed, right here, now, this night. And more tomorrow. And the day after that, and after that—till they had achieved everything that was reasonable and beautiful in human society." (pp. 136-7). And Cohen tells us—"He sat down, and I felt ashamed, ashamed of the unnecessary trouble I had put him to. Every time I turned around I could see that these people were in the midst of a gigantic rearrangement, they were trying to clear away the odds and ends of exploded centuries—and I had started an argument about a plate." Cohen has his explanations for the shortcomings of Soviet Russia—but the shortcomings of every other country are a different thing altogether. For them he has no compassion; for them there are no mitigating circumstances. In Russia we have the new world of communism, and everything done or undone to achieve it is forgiven; but in the rest of the world we have a dying exploded capitalism. . .

3.

Joseph Freeman's "An American Testament"* is a book of another character altogether. It is an autobiography, but an autobiography not only of himself, but of his generation, of the rebels and romantics of Greenwich Village out of whom came the communists and socialists and

*"An American Testament," by Joseph Freeman, Farrar and Rinehart, New York.

Trotzkyists of today. Freeman is only forty, but nowadays, when men of thirty and twenty are writing their autobiographies, forty is an advanced age. Freeman is the present editor of the *New Masses* and one of the literary and intellectual idols of the Communist Party in America, but for all that there is not a trace of the smugness and superiority which one finds in "Two Worlds." He writes with an honesty and sincerity and passion born of agony and strife and ceaseless searching. "An American Testament" is a fine and beautifully written book, which is bound to take its place among the significant and enduring American autobiographies.

Freeman's is the story of a typical Jewish boy born in a Ukrainian village and brought to America at the age of seven. He attended both a Hebrew school and an elementary school. It is from the Bible he was taught in the Hebrew school of Mr. Neumann that he got his passion for social justice and from the neighbor's boys — the Kaplan boys — that he got his knowledge of socialism and of the life of the toiling masses. He early showed a flair for writing and contributed stories and poetry to the *Young Judaean* and to Y.P.S.L. magazines. But when he became a student at Columbia he was swept away by the liberalism of the Wilsonian era, and forgot both his Zionism and his socialism. He dreamed of becoming a great writer, an artist who would live in a realm outside and above the strife and turmoil of economics and politics.

Freeman, like so many of his generation, went to France after the war and lived as self-exile in the true Bohemia of the world—Paris. He drifted into an artistic Bohemianism which expressed itself in rebellion against conventions,—conventions of religion and marriage and dress and many other things for which Greenwich Village stands, and also in a romantic preoccupation with the creation of a new spirit, a new society, a social and artistic utopia. During this period, too, he, like his generation, was worried about the problem of the artist in society. Is he supposed to be above the battle of the classes, or is it the function of the artist to engage in the sordid, every-day struggle of the masses? Freeman tells in great detail of the Greenwich Village of those days, of their endless debates and conversations, about Art and Society; of the birth of the old *Masses,* of the role and influence and final betrayal of their idols,—Max Eastman and Floyd Dell and others. His main purpose is to trace his own evolution during all these periods, and to describe how he finally was won over to the cause of communism and to the communist concept of the role of the artist in society. But before he was finally convinced he went through agonizing doubts and tortures of heart and brain. He lived and worked and created in Soviet Russia, and his conversion was slow and painful, and only at the long last was he able to achieve serenity and peace and firm conviction. In thus telling his own story he tells the literary story of a generation as well as the story of the birth and growth of the proletarian parties in America.

In view of Freeman's Jewish upbringing, his present lack of curiosity about Jewish life and Jewish culture is significant. As a boy he studied Hebrew in a modern Hebrew school, loved the Bible and was inspired by its prophetic writings, belonged to Young Judaea and was an enthusiastic Zionist. True, his parents were not Zionistic and his home atmosphere was not very Jewish, but still he had imbibed enough of Jewish learning to make his interest in Jewish life more than an accident of birth. As a man, he spent considerable time in Russia, traveling everywhere and seeing everything. All that was being created in Soviet Russia interested him. He was particularly impressed with what Russia was doing for the national minorities and for the revival and growth of the many tongues and literature and cultures of these minorities.

Yet the problem of the Jewish group life in Soviet Russia, of Jewish culture, of what was being done in Russia by Jews in the realm of Yiddish literature and culture—all this interested him not at all. There is no better evidence than Freeman, of Red assimilationism, of complete conversion to a new religion, a new civilization. Freeman no longer has anything in common with his Jewish life. Linguistically, ideologically, religiously, if you will, he has gone over to communism. Nothing remains of his Jewishness but the memories of his childhood.

Of equal interest is his conversion as an artist to the communist concept of the role of the artist in society. It must be remembered that at all times Freeman was and is a sensitive writer and artist, and that his greatest struggle throughout his life has been to reconcile the conflict between art and life, art and society, art and the cause of communism. For he was brought up to love Shelley and Keats. He dreamt of being a poet in an ivory tower —far above the madding crowd. He wanted to devote his life to Art—Art which was somehow apart from and above and outside life. An artist's concern is with beauty and the spirit and not with commonplace economic problems. It took him a long time to be won over to the Marxist view—that art must be harnessed to the cause of the proletarian class struggle, that the artist must live and work with the masses, write for them and to them, that art must be grounded in economic and social realities; all this and more against which his heart had rebelled, he had to learn. But in the end he becomes converted even to the idea that an artist must subject himself to party discipline. In Berlin, he picks up Freud's book on Michelangelo, in which Freud tries to explain why Michelangelo had hewn out quite a different Moses from the traditional one. "He gave the motif of the broken tablets another meaning. They are not broken by the prophet's anger. On the contrary, the warning that the tablets may be broken halts the anger, prevents its conversion into action. Whereby the artist put something new into the figure of Moses; the mighty mass of body and the forceful muscles of the figure became the corporeal expression *for the highest spiritual achievement of which man is capable, for the subordination of one's own passions in the interest of a goal which one has chosen.*" (p. 658) And Freeman recalls another story his mother told him about Moses, and the story he had read in Mr. Neumann's Hebrew class, but whose ending he had never heard, because the last page was missing. All pointed the same moral—that one must subordinate his private passions to the highest goal. In leading a people to freedom, one has obligations, one has to submerge his nature, his passions to the task at hand.

And I wonder if the irony of his situation ever struck Freeman. For how similar is his attitude to the attitude of his ancestors whose law he has repudiated. For they too accepted their religion and their Torah in the same way. They too spoke of the yoke of the law, of a life of discipline to God based on the law, and they rationalized their whole acceptance of the law on the same grounds, despite their doubts and misgivings and deviations and sufferings. Freeman has made a complete circuit. He has gone back to the ways of his fathers, but he has yoked himself to a new Law, a new Torah, a new civilization. Who knows, maybe *he* is the true descendant of the prophetic line. Certainly no one reading his story can doubt his passionate sincerity and devotion, nor the nobility of his attitude to life and to the task he has taken upon himself to remake it.

4.

Gessner's book* is also a book of travel; but it is unlike Cohen's book. Gessner traveled with the specific purpose of try-

*"Some of My Best Friends Are Jews," by Robert Gessner, Farrar and Rinehart, New York.

ing to find a solution to the Jewish problem. A product of a small mid-western town, Gessner did not come into contact with the problem of anti-Semitism or with Jews, for that matter, until he came to New York to teach at the New York University. It wasn't until Hitler burst upon the world like a tornado, that Gessner became aroused by the problem of anti-Semitism and of Jews, and it was to satisfy his curiosity about Jews which had thus been aroused, and to find an answer to the baffling Jewish problem, that he took his trip abroad. And so Gessner, too, went to England and France and Germany and Poland and Palestine and Russia. And everywhere he went, he sought out the Jews and their habitats and observed and talked and argued the Jewish problem.

Gessner too is honest and sincere and tries to be eminently fair in what he writes. But he too has a formula, a facile yardstick to apply—and his findings were foregone conclusions. He has written an interesting and provocative book, which contains a great deal of damaging and disturbing material. He feels he has been thoroughly objective in his conclusions. He can smile indulgently at all of us. He has not only read; he has seen with his own eyes. He has read and studied and observed. It is only the rest of us who are prejudiced and emotionally and hopelessly conditioned.

And what does he find in all his travels? —that Jewish unity is a myth, that there is no such thing as a Jew, that there are only rich Jews and poor Jews, exploiting and exploited. The rich Jewish landlords of London extort exorbitant rents from the poor Jews in Whitechapel and salve their consciences by giving charity to the synagogue. The victimized Dreyfuses of France dissociate themselves from the other Jews. The rich Jews of Germany supported Hitlerism, the middle class Jews try to deny atrocity stories and beg the Jews abroad not to protest or boycott. And so it goes. The roots of anti-Semitism are economic, and only the overthrow of capitalism will do away with anti-Semitism. Gessner is moved by what he sees. He feels pity and compassion. "The rabbi is praying, and his prayer seems a living thing because it is natural. Although he flutters his delicate hands about his ears, the tragic supplication is spontaneous. His voice, singing prayers as though they were lyrics of Shelley's lament is sadly sincere. My eyes begin to move in rhythm with his. There is a high song running in my throat, although I know no words or music of the prayer. The boys are looking at me, nudging each other. . . . Am I a Jew? It is not at the moment an important question. The prayers of rich Jews in the Reform Temple did not move me. But a plain rabbi in the poor ghetto of Berlin moves me, because he is not praying for the soul of von Hindenburg. He is praying out of the anguish of a pogrom" (p. 96).

All Gessner knows are the pogrom and the economic motive. But the rabbi's anguish was caused by more than the pogrom, and the pogrom was more than economic in motive. The Jew has through the ages insisted on being what he is, keeping his God, his law,—and that too is part of the rabbi's burden and prayer. Gessner tells us he read a great deal about Jews before he set out on his trip. He may have read *about* Jews and Judaism, but he has never learned the Jewish past itself, nor has he ever lived the complete Jewish life, and it is the significance of these things which escapes him.

Gessner spent a great deal of time in Palestine and Russia. Unlike Cohen—he really lived and searched in Palestine and learned to know it well. And unlike Freeman he did concern himself with the problem of Jews and Jewish culture in Soviet Russia.

What did he find in Palestine? He found that Zionism is a religion; that Tel-Aviv has a ghetto; that the utopian *k'vutzot* have survived because of heavy subsidies; that only a small percentage of the Jews are on the land; that the wealth

of Palestine depends too much on the orange; that big business in Palestine is like big business everywhere — it hires cheap labor and exploits Arab and Jew alike; that Zionism has not eradicated anti-Semitism—it has only intensified racial prejudice in another part of the earth; that the Histadrut's pro-Arab theories are only words—that it is not really interested in organizing the Arab worker in the same unions with Jews; that Zionism is speculation on anti-Semitism; that England is using both the Arabs and the Jews for her own purposes.

Gessner tries to be as fair as he can be in his estimate of Palestine and gives credit where credit is due. That he sometimes errs in his facts has been pointed out by other reviewers. But these errors are not so important. What is important is that Gessner fails to see the larger implications of the problem—though according to his version—it is we who fail to see the larger implications. Gessner is for *the* solution to the Jewish problem, and there is none. For few claim for Palestine that it is the *only* solution to the Jewish problem. Gessner is knocking down a straw man he himself has set up. Then again, like the others, he is willing to make allowances for Russia, but few or none for other countries. The errors made in Palestine are proof that Zionism is a fraud; the errors made in Russia—are only human errors made because of the novelty of the experiment and the immensity of the problem. And like Herzl whom he quotes he too sees the Jewish problem as a problem of Jews alone and not of Judaism as well. For Palestine is the refuge and the home not only for Jews who have no other home, but for the Jewish spirit, for Jewish creativity. We must think of all the problems of the Jews—past, present and future in judging any one solution. Respect for personality means respecting a person not only with reference to what he is but with reference to what he was and will be and can be. Finally, the trouble with Gessner's comment on Palestine is that it leads to the question: what of it? We are told our only salvation lies in working for the revolution. But what of the 450,000 Jews in Palestine today? What of the Palestine growing from year to year? What of the pogromized Jews clamoring to go to Palestine? What of the Jewish life that is going on? Shall all of it stop? Shall we stick to our concentration camps and our ghettos and die like martyrs until the classless society arrives?

But of course Gessner will tell you—we always have Russia and Biro-Bidjan. It was to be expected that Gessner would go into rhapsodies over Russia and over the Jews in Russia. In Russia he found no anti-Semitism. In Russia he found that to ask one's nationality was an antiquated question. In Russia he found the Jewish proletariat could be truly Marxist because it was living under socialism; in Palestine the Marxism of the Histadrut was only a sham, because it was living under capitalism.

In Russia, Gessner found Jews assimilated economically yet identifiable, culturally. Economic assimilation then is the solution to the Jewish problem, and that is impossible only in a non-competitive society. He waxes enthusiastic over the cultural autonomy of the Jews in Soviet Russia. He admits that, in their zeal, the Bolsheviks have unnecessarily eliminated some of the worthwhile cultural traditions—the Bible, and certain medieval writings. He asks why the Zionists should assume a monopoly on the Jews' cultural inheritance. "In the meanwhile," he continues, "the new Jewish culture in the U.S.S.R. is far from being set, everything existing more or less in flux. What final form it will have, no one at this stage can fully describe. This much is certain: it will be Jewish and it will be Soviet, the amalgamation producing an emancipated Jew, the like of whom no man has yet seen." (p. 344)

To this we can only say: "Amen." It remains to be seen, however, whether Jews in Russia will want to be culturally identified, whether they will be permitted to

include so much of their past which they have been forced to exclude, whether the linguistic culture produced in Yiddish will really be a Jewish culture.

Coming back to America, he found the same disheartening prevalence of anti-Semitism he had found abroad. He warns American Jews that anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem, that only the reactionaries and fascists say it is. What happened in Germany should be a lesson to us. "In America, too, anti-Semitism is a hoax used to entrench the status quo, a medieval bogeyman of the controlling class to keep itself in power. Gentiles and Jews alike are its victims. The only way out is the road to a classless society."

Gessner too writes out of agonizing anxiety and is sincere in his analysis and his advice. With most of his economic analysis of anti-Semitism and the Jewish problem we are in hearty agreement. We go further, however. We wish to utilize the Jewish past and Jewish cultural life in this fight for a classless society. It is through our Jewishness that we wish to attain our goal.

Social and Economic Conditions Today*

IN THE present period of changing standards and rapidly emerging problems, we cannot rest content with general formulations. In this and succeeding issues of our Semi-Annual Comment, the Social Justice Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly seeks to apply these fundamental viewpoints to contemporary issues. Thus, we shall make our contribution to the elucidation and solution of our problems in the spirit of the ideals of justice, freedom and peace, enunciated by the Torah and the Prophets of Israel and implicit in the entire body of Jewish tradition.

1. The New Social Trends

The bulk of laws dealing with social and economic issues adopted by Congress in recent years still represents an inchoate and often inconsistent body of legislation that has been growing up piece-meal, often in response to political and other extraneous considerations. Nevertheless, we recognize the "New Deal" as a practical attempt to bring about orderly social change and thus demonstrate that democracy is capable of serving the needs of an evolving social order without recourse to the violence of dictatorship. We, therefore, applaud the general spirit of the New Deal with its humanitarian emphasis and its recognition of the primacy of human rights.

In particular, we are gratified by the success of the Tennessee Valley Authority, which is an important step forward in the cooperative ownership and use of our national resources. We hail the Wagner Labor Relations Bill as marking the official recognition by the American people of the role of the labor unions in advancing the social and economic institutions of labor and thus serving the welfare of the American people as a whole.

We regret the strife between the various groups in organized labor and above all the existence of racketeering groups which have seized power in certain unions. We are, however, emphatically opposed to the wholesale condemnation of labor union tactics because of these imperfections in its organization, which ought to be eliminated as speedily as possible.

2. The Budget and Relief

We feel that the balancing of governmental expenditures would be of incalculable benefit to the nation. We vigorously oppose, however, the attempt to use this slogan as an excuse for curtailing necessary relief and unemployment expenditures. In time of national emergency, whether war or depression, it is difficult to balance the budget out of current income. If, how-

*The semi-annual comment issued by the Social Justice Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly of America.

ever, the budget must be balanced now, it should be done through higher taxes on the larger income classes, a procedure which is just and equitable at a time of constantly mounting profits.

3. The Supreme Court Issue*

Deeply concerned with the ills of present social and economic conditions, we are convinced that these evils can be remedied only through broad-visioned, socially advanced legislation by Congress, supplemented by State action. In increasing measure, the United States Supreme Court has been invalidating Federal and State legislation designed to promote the social and economic welfare of the American people, which would incidentally strengthen faith in democracy.

We therefore welcome as a practical and timely proposal the President's plan to increase the number of Supreme Court Justices, thus infusing new and younger blood into the judicial system. We urge the adoption of the President's plan at this session of Congress, concurrently with the initiation of an amendment, to deal with the need of judicial reform in a fundamental manner. Such an amendment is to be clearly viewed as a supplement and not a substitute for the President's plan.

4. Child Labor Amendment

The Rabbinical Assembly has consistently favored the adoption of the Child Labor Amendment now under consideration before various State Legislatures. When the measure was being discussed by the New York State Legislature, early in 1937, the following telegram was sent to the Judiciary Committee, which summarizes our point of view.

"The Social Justice Committee of Rabbinical Assembly of America respectfully urges early ratification of Child Labor Amendment. We see in it no infringement of the rights of parents or the genuine interests of our growing generation. On the contrary, it is a basic necessity for the protection of our youth and the advancement of physical, mental and spiritual welfare of our state and nation."

We are encouraged to feel that the overwhelming majority of religious leaders and laity have recognized the importance of this amendment for the physical and spiritual welfare of the nation and have given it their support. We urge that new and more energetic efforts be put forth to bring about an early adoption of this amendment and that religious groups take an active part in this movement.

5. Neutrality Legislation

On the 20th anniversary of the entrance of the United States into the World War, which was heralded as the war to end war and make the world safe for democracy, the world situation is pregnant with war dangers in many quarters. The mounting tariff walls and the economic isolationism of modern nations, the growth of chauvinistic nationalism, the menace of Fascist expansion and the precipitated race for armaments offer scant hope for enduring world peace. As in 1917, there are those who in the name of ideals like peace or democracy or social progress would embroil us in the next conflagration. We believe that our passion for universal peace must dictate a plan of complete neutrality for the United States in the event of such a war. The nations of the world should be warned, while peace still prevails, that America plans to remain neutral and that war supplies and credits will be denied any and all belligerents. The knowledge that America will not be available as a source of war supplies and financial assistance may cause the warmongers to hesitate before taking the fatal step, for war under modern conditions is of long duration and uncertain results. At all events, world peace would surely not be advanced by the entrance of America into another world war.

We consequently favor the enactment by Congress of legislation which will commit America publicly and by law to a definite policy of neutrality. This policy is to be based on an embargo of war materials, manufactures and foodstuffs, and credit facilities to all belligerents, as well as a prohibition of travel to American

*This report was issued before the announcement of Justice Van Devanter's retirement from the Supreme Court bench.

citizens on belligerent vessels or in belligerent territories, except at their own risk.

In short, the purpose of our neutrality policy must be the isolation of America so that this country will not become involved in any controversy with any belligerent that may eventually lead to entrance into the struggle. Such a policy will assure peace for America, and ultimately will redound to the cause of world peace.

We condemn the Hill-Sheppard Bill as laying the foundations for a military dictatorship and Fascism in America, and urge all lovers of peace and freedom to register an effective protest against this measure.

6. The Spanish Situation

The conflict in Spain between the accredited legally elected government and the Fascist rebels is of signal importance as foreshadowing the world struggle between democracy and the forces of repression. We are particularly heartened by the active support given by large sections of the Clergy, particularly in the Basque country, to the Loyalist Government, which has made democracy and social progress its watchwords.

We urge all Americans to contribute to such humanitarian and non-military funds as the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy.

We hope and pray that the carnage may soon cease and the unhappy land be given a respite to bind up the wounds of war.

7. Cultural Relations With Germany

In spite of the widespread lip service to liberalism and academic freedom indulged in by Americans generally and by American university presidents in particular, we have never given the same unequivocal loyalty to these causes as have the British universities. They have practically all refused to lend their prestige to the Nazi propaganda machine which will utilize the Gottingen University Celebration for its own vicious ends. Many important American institutions of learning, on the other hand, have shown no such sincerity and courage. We call upon those universities that have accepted the invitation, to withdraw their acceptances and thus demonstrate their genuine loyalty to the ideals of human freedom and untrammeled scholarly and scientific research.

8. Disarmament

The rumored overtures recently made by the French and British governments to our own, regarding the calling of a disarmament conference, appear visionary in its extreme at the present juncture of affairs. Nevertheless, the proposal ought to find a warm response in the hearts of the American people.

Whatever little success may attend the work of such a conference would be a gain. Moreover, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the world-wide peace sentiment coupled with the fear of modern war and its uncertainties, might contribute tangible results on behalf of disarmament and peace.

Summary

The Social Justice Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly favors the general tendency and spirit of the recently adopted Social Legislation and in particular approves of the TVA, the Wagner Relations Bill, and emphasizes the importance of the Labor Union movement for the welfare of the American people.

It opposes the curtailment of relief expenditures on the score of economy and balancing the budget.

It endorses the President's plan for the re-organization of the Supreme Court concurrently with an amendment to modify the present powers of the Court.

It favors stringent Neutrality Legislation that will keep America out of war in word and deed. It condemns the Hill-Sheppard Bill as a menace to American freedom.

It sends its heartiest best wishes to the Spanish Loyalist Government and urges the support of all agencies that are seeking to relieve the distress of the suffering Spanish people in this hour of crisis.

It favors the exploration of the possibility of a Disarmament Conference to mitigate the horrors of war and postpone, if not eliminate, the outbreak of hostilities.